



Phone Addiction in the Workplace

Smartphones are marvelous mobile devices that change the way we work and give us boundless flexibility. They also capture our minds and create endless distractions that draw our attention away from things that matter.

A recent survey by CareerBuilder found 55% of employers blame mobile phones for decreased productivity. More than 80% of workers said they keep their smartphones within eye contact at work, and 66% say they use their phones several times throughout the workday.

A study by researchers at Florida State University found that the routine notification of a new text message or email can cause worker performance to drop, even if a person doesn't check the phone to see what arrived. The probability of making an error among employees who received a phone call notification while working increased 28%. With a text notification, the error probability increased only slightly less at 23%.

Ring and Ding Madness?

How big of a problem is this? Consider that it spurred the need for a new product called Pause, a sleek metal box for use on a conference room table. Meeting attendees put their phones in the box which, once sealed, blocks all Wi-Fi and cellular signals, rendering the phones useless. Have we actually reached the point where the only way to keep us from our phones is to purchase a specially manufactured box that keeps them from ringing or dinging? Basically, they created a nice-looking box that turns our phones into expensive paperweights. But can't we just silence our phones? Or put them in a shoebox? That's where the creator of the device, Yuval Lazi, provides insight to human behavior: "If people can do it in other ways, then I'm all for it," he said. "If somebody can shut off his phone and not look at it and put it away, that's great."

The problem is, we don't do that. How many meetings have you been to where people were asked to silence their phones but didn't? How many times have you given a presentation and looked out at a slew of people discreetly checking email?

Consider these Alternatives

How can we avoid the extreme measure of the metal box? Consider adopting these personal practices, or working within your office or unit to develop a shared workplace culture around smart phone usage:

- Many apps are available to help you limit cellphone usage
- Track your smartphone habits for a week
- Try limiting cell phone use to specific break times only
- Put it somewhere you can't easily reach it
- Create mutual workgroup agreements about putting away and silencing phones during meetings
- Replace the habit—on your next break, invite a coworker to eat with you instead of spending the time on social media



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